

A Wallet, A Dollar, and the Existence of God



A Training Manual
Making a Case for the Reasonable Nature of Christian Theism
in Short Three Steps

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A Visual Investigation

We live in a visual world. The power of communication has always been largely non-verbal (so much of what we mean is directly tied to the non-verbal cues we give one another, even when we are talking!) Perhaps this is why we are so driven to find visual object lessons with which to communicate the reasonable nature of the Christian Worldview. There are times when the best way to communicate the truth about the existence and nature of God is to simply DEMONSTRATE the realities with something we can SEE. “Seeing is believing”! Our “Wallet” object lesson is designed to get people thinking about the rational and reasonable nature of Christian Theism.

A Balanced Investigation

We hope to provide a visual tool that addresses several big worldview questions that all of us have, and address these questions in a balanced way. “A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” is designed to address these big questions:

“Does God Exist? Is the Existence of God Necessary?”

“What is God Like? Is God a Personal Being?”

“What Does God Require of Me? How Can I Be More Like God?”

We do believe that a simple illustration can go a long way toward describing reasonable nature of Christianity. Our goal here is to open an intellectual doorway, to remove intellectual obstacles, and to start people thinking about the existence and nature of God in a balanced way.

An Accurate Investigation

“A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” is NOT a Gospel invitation; it is simply an invitation to begin thinking about the reasonable reality that God exists and has a plan to bring us home. Our desire is to be accurate in the way that we look at the existence of God both philosophically and scientifically. “A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” discussions will hopefully open the door and allow you to begin a much deeper theological discussion that is Bible centered, in either the same or a later meetings. Our desire is to accurately describe the scientific and philosophical evidences that support the existence of God, so those who are holding objections in these two areas might release these objections and consider the truth of the Christian message.

A Limited Investigation

“A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” is not intended to be a thorough and exhaustive investigation of the scientific and philosophical evidence for God’s existence (you wouldn’t expect an in depth discussion about such issues to be illustrated with a wallet, would you!?) Instead, our “wallet” object lesson attempts to clearly and simply explain some rather complex truths in a way that will cause people to think about more about the necessity of God’s existence. In addition to this, “A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” falls far short of articulating the Christian Gospel of Salvation. Our object lesson describes a God that is uniquely Christian in nature, but does little to illuminate the truth of what is required to be saved.

“A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” is a visual tool that will provide you with a platform from which the Gospel message might be heard.

How to Use “A Wallet, A Dollar, and the Existence of God”

Our object lesson is designed to be told over lunch, at the coffee shop, while riding on a bus or sitting next to someone in class. It's simple (hopefully) and self contained. Here are some tips to make the most of the “A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God”:

Be Ready With the Materials

The object lesson utilizes the simplest of materials. Most everyone carries some kind of wallet, and that is really all that is needed. But we've also done part of the lesson with larger objects (like a shoe box and a playing card, for example, to illustrate the first point). The wallet and dollar are, however, the best way to illustrate the second two points of the object lesson. If you want to walk through all three points, you're going to need to have a wallet and dollar ready to go.

Remember the Progression

The object lesson is designed in three parts to make a sequential argument for the existence of a Christian God. The best way to use the object lesson is simply to remember the progression of the illustration:

The Existence of God is the best explanation for the appearance of matter
The Existence of a Personal God is the best explanation for the finite nature of the universe
The Existence of the Christian Personal God best accounts for God's personal desire to provide a guideline for truly moral behavior

Keep It As Simple As Possible

Our object lesson attempts to discuss some pretty complicated issues, and the odds are good that you are not a scientist and even better that your audience are not scientists either! So let's do our best to keep the discussion simple without ignoring the important issues at hand. One way to accomplish this is to first master the topics, then spend some time simplifying the issues for general consumption. Pleaseconvinceme.com has a number of articles in the “Theism” section that can help you master the issues at hand.

Use the Training Manual

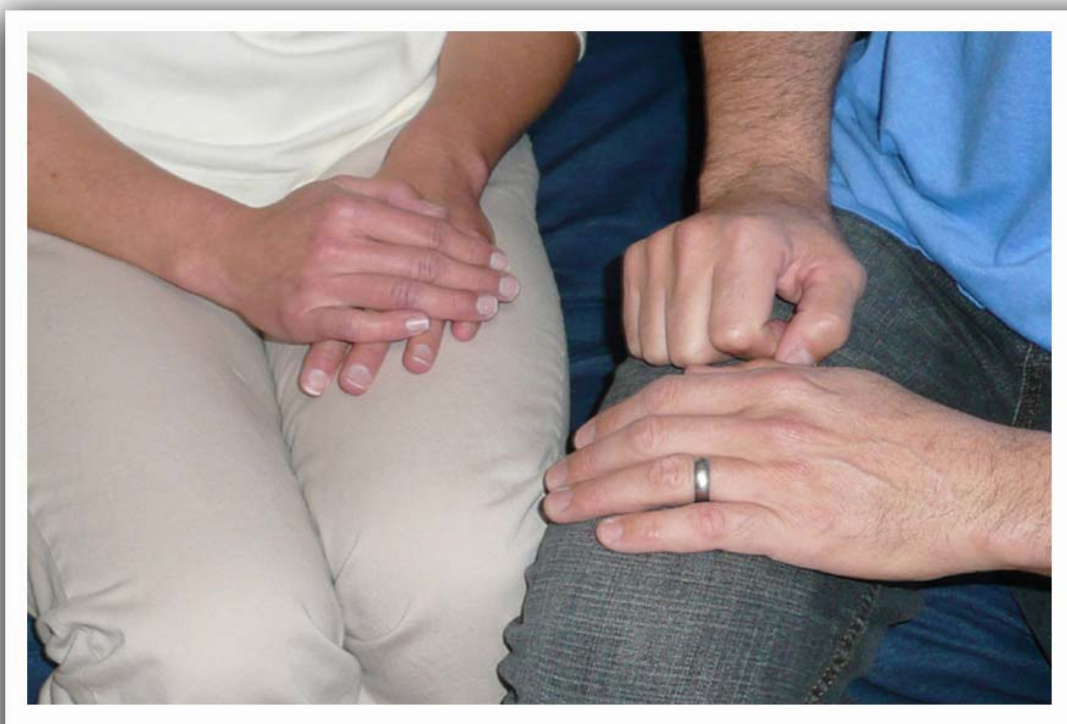
Spend some time then, talking the progression through in your head after you've mastered the concepts more deeply. This training manual is divided into three components: the 'black type' narrative, the 'red type' physical instructions and the 'blue type' issues for additional consideration. Master the 'black type' narrative in your own words. This narrative is the guideline for the discussion you might have with a friend. The 'blue type' issues are not necessarily going to be discussed as part of this conversation, but mastering these points will help you take the conversation to the next level if the opportunity presents itself.

Watch the Video

You can see an example of how “A Wallet, A Dollar and the Existence of God” can be delivered by watching the video available at www.PleaseConvinceMe.com (listed under the “Theism” section of the site).

Introduction: Stepping Toward God

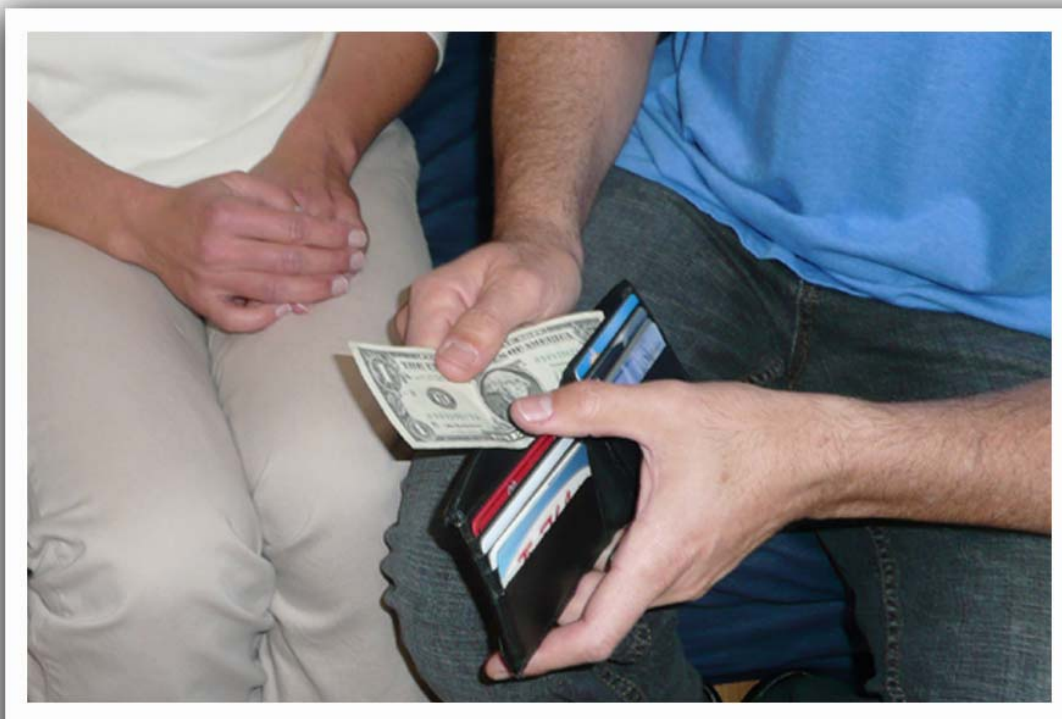
“Sometimes I am asked why I am a Christian. People often want a simple answer to this question, although I’m not sure the answer is really all that simple. But when push comes to shove, I can tell you that I am a Christian not because I was raised as a Christian, not because it works for me, and not because I had some deep need that Christianity met. I am a Christian because it is TRUE. Christianity is reasonable; it makes sense. It explains what I see in my own nature and in the world around me. That’s all there is to it. Let me share something with you that I hope will at least make it possible for you to see the reasonable nature Christian Theism...”



(Be prepared to describe the three steps toward Christian Theism. All you'll need is a wallet and a dollar bill)

Part One: What Reason is There to Believe God Exists?

“Let me pull out my wallet and tell you why I believe what I believe. Let me open the money section. See this dollar bill? It’s alone in my wallet. Now let me ask you a simple question: ‘How did the dollar bill get in the wallet?’ I realize that this sounds like a ridiculously simple question, but let me make it a little more interesting. I want you to answer that question without going OUTSIDE the wallet for an answer.”



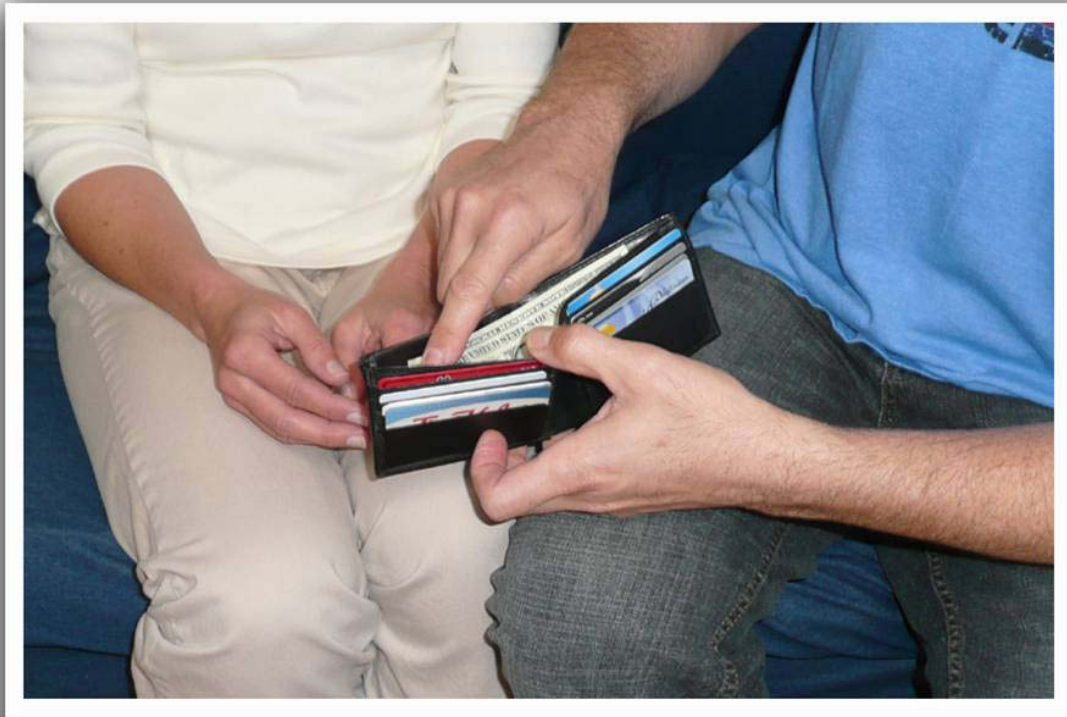
(Present your wallet and pull out a dollar bill from the interior. Show the dollar bill and have it ready for examination)

“Now before you contemplate a response here, let’s take a better look at the dollar. Clearly, the dollar bill is an amazing object. It contains so much detail! Specific numbers and drawings and words are inked on the paper. The dollar contains MORE than simple markings and symbols; these markings and symbols convey INFORMATION. And information is evidence that INTELLIGENCE is involved in the creation of the dollar. Information requires an intelligent mind to place the markings and symbols in a meaningful way, then an intelligent mind to interpret and understand what is meant by these markings. So, the dollar is clearly the product of intelligence. You and I would hardly disagree on this simple issue. We know that the dollar has been designed by humans.”



(Present the dollar and point out the presence of detailed and specific information on the bill)

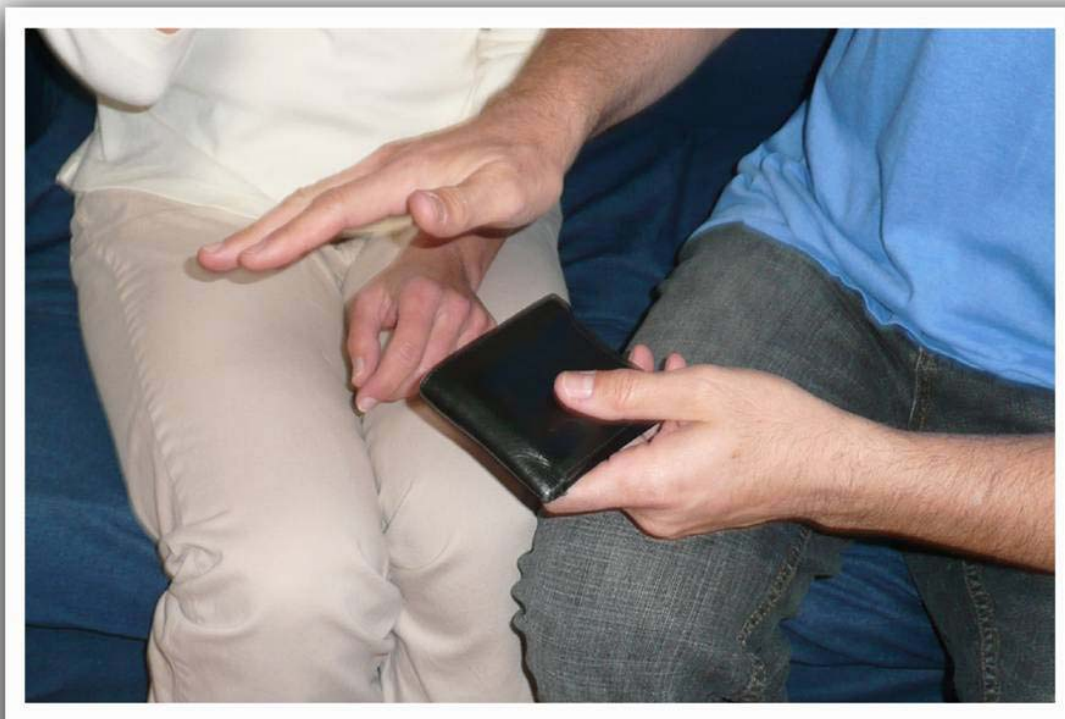
“So now, let’s talk about how the dollar got in my wallet. What are the possibilities? I know you are inclined to say the obvious: ‘Someone put that dollar in there!’ but that answer is not allowed; remember that I said that you have to answer the question without going outside the wallet for the answer, and you and I are on the outside. Yes, you could reasonably and logically presume that I (or someone else) put the dollar in the wallet, and yes I know that is without a doubt the very best and most reasonable conclusion. But our rules here simply won’t allow this answer. You’re going to have to stay INSIDE the wallet for the answer; whatever process you decide was involved in the appearance of this dollar, it must come from inside the wallet.”



(Put the dollar bill back in the wallet)

“OK, so what are the possibilities that are left to us? How could the dollar get in the wallet if it wasn’t placed in there by someone or something OUTSIDE the wallet? Well, if you really think about it, there are only two options left to us. First, it might simply be that the dollar was ALWAYS in the wallet. It’s as old as the wallet and it has always been in the wallet. The other possibility is that the dollar formed over time from much more primitive materials that were in the wallet to begin with. Two options: the dollar is as old as the wallet, or the dollar has somehow evolved from other materials that have always been in the wallet. But let’s face it, neither of these answers really makes any sense. You and I know that wallets don’t come from the store with money in them, and we also know that small pieces of paper and ink didn’t just happen to come together with all the detail and complexity of the dollar.”

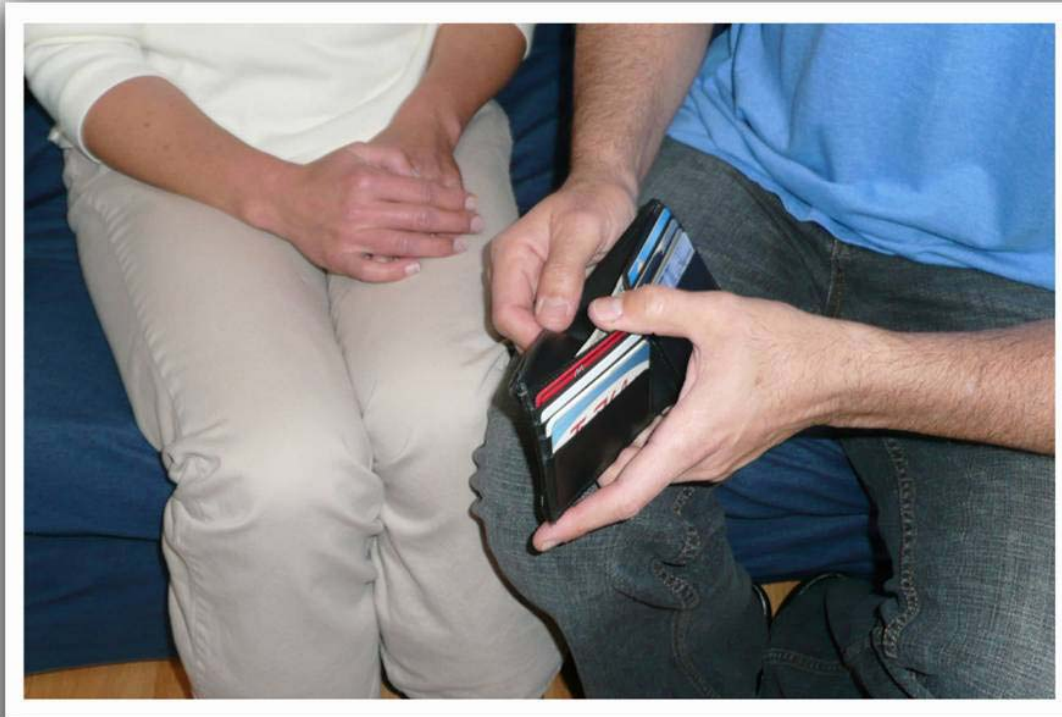
“OK, so what does all this have to do with the existence of God? With this simple illustration we are describing the problem that atheists, philosophical naturalists and materialists have when they try to explain how life began in the universe. How does matter come from non-matter? How does life come from non-life? How does INFORMATION appear in the DNA code if there is no INTELLIGENCE behind the code? It’s just like trying to explain how the dollar got in the wallet! If we limit ourselves to only natural, physical materialistic explanations, we simply cannot go outside the natural, physical materialistic realm for an answer. In essence, we cannot go outside the wallet. And if we force ourselves to stay inside the natural realm, we have to conclude that the matter and life we see in this universe has either always been here, or it has evolved over time from lesser base elements. It’s just like the dollar. If we have to stay inside the wallet for an answer, there are only a couple of possibilities”



(Close the wallet and focus on the outside of the wallet while the bill is tucked away inside)

“But the possibilities we’ve talked about are pretty lame, aren’t they? They don’t really satisfy us. Science has given us a ton of evidence to show that matter and the universe itself have NOT always been here! We now know that the universe had a beginning. Science has come to call this beginning the ‘Big Bang’. Starting with Einstein and continuing to today, science tells us that all space, time and matter had a beginning. We know that matter in the universe is NOT infinitely old, and life in the universe appears even more recently. Our first answer, (that matter and life are as old as the universe) simply doesn’t explain how the universe ITSELF got here! If the universe had a beginning, then it makes sense that the universe had a beginner, and this beginner simply MUST have come from someplace other than the universe it began!”

“And if life evolved from other base materials, how did these base materials come to exist in the first place? How did something come from nothing, even if this something is very basic and primitive in nature? How did matter (regardless of how ‘basic’ this matter may be) suddenly appear within the natural realm? Can any satisfactory explanation be offered?”



(Use the wallet to make the point that the most obvious conclusion is that someone placed the bill inside the wallet)

“Clearly the most satisfying answer for how a highly designed object appears within the wallet is to conclude that someone or something PLACED that object in the wallet. It’s crazy to limit our answers to sources that are INSIDE the wallet. When we do that we get a biased answer! The most UNBIASED approach would be for us to at least allow ourselves the POSSIBILITY that the answer may be OUTSIDE the wallet. In a similar way, it seems to me that the most unbiased science would also respect the possibility that the supernatural realm (OUTSIDE the natural order) might be a source for all the matter and life we see in the universe.”

“I believe that THEISM is true because the existence of an all-powerful first cause OUTSIDE the natural realm is the best and most reasonable inference from the evidence.”

More to Think About

There are some important realities that must be addressed when we talk about the beginning of all space time and matter. First, we have to recognize that space, time and matter have a BEGINNING. We know this is true from the physical scientific evidence (for more information, visit our page on "[Evidence from the Creation](#)"). But more importantly, this truth is described in the Scripture! The Bible tells us that there is a beginning to time:

1 Corinthians 2:6-7

"We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began."

2 Timothy 1:9

"...who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time..."

In addition, the Bible tells us that there is a beginning to space and matter:

Genesis 1:1

"In the beginning God created the Heaven and the earth."

And we simply must recognize that anything that begins must have a beginner. And this beginner cannot also have a beginning, because it too would then have a beginner, and we still would lack an answer to our dilemma. Something (whether it is natural or supernatural) must have a beginning. And science has provided us with NO example of anything that is eternally old. The Bible is clear about this, however. The eternally old first cause of the universe is God:

Isaiah 26:4

"Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal."

Jeremiah 10:10

"But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King."

1 Timothy 1:17

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen"

The Bible affirms two truths that both science and philosophy propose about our universe. First: all space, time and matter have a beginning. Second: the cause of finite, limited things must ultimately be something that is itself uncaused. The Bible tells us that our universe had a beginning and the beginner was an eternal God.

Step Two: What Kind of God Exists?

“Even if we are convinced that the first appearance of life in the universe is best explained as the result of a ‘First Cause’ Creator God from outside the natural realm, this still leaves us several options as to the NATURE of this God. Is this God personal? Isn’t it possible that the God who formed matter from non-matter and life from non-life may simply be some kind of impersonal force? After all, many world religions would suggest that this is the case.”



(Position the wallet so that you can drop it on the ground)

"I believe that this creator God is a personal God based on His ability to DECIDE. Let me explain. Let's return to our wallet for a second. What happens if I simply let go of the wallet? What forces are felt by the wallet? When I let go of this wallet, it immediately drops to the ground. Why does that happen? Why doesn't it just float here for a minute and then drop to the ground when gravity DECIDES to act on it? Why don't we EVER see that happen? You and I already know the answer! Gravity does not DECIDE to act at all! Gravity is an IMPERSONAL force, and it has been our experience that the EFFECT of an impersonal force is felt the minute that the force enters into the environment."



(Drop the wallet on the ground)

“If we were floating around in a zero gravity environment (an imaginary room, for example) and we then inserted the force of gravity into this room, we would all immediately be pulled to the floor. The effect of the gravity is felt the minute gravity enters the room. That’s the way impersonal forces work. They can’t DECIDE whether or not they will activate their effect. Their impact is felt immediately; the minute the force enters the room. Gravity doesn’t enter the room and say, “Not yet, not yet, not yet... OK, now!” Gravity cannot DECIDE when its effect will be felt. It cannot DECIDE when it will act.”



“See, the ability to DECIDE whether to act is a characteristic of ‘personhood’. The ability to move and act FREELY as a result of a conscious independent decision is a characteristic of free agency. It is a characteristic common to PERSONS, not impersonal forces. Does that make sense?”

“OK, so what does that tell you about the force that created the universe? Well, if it’s an impersonal force, then it can only be as old as the universe. In other words, the minute the impersonal force existed, its creative power was felt, and ‘bingo’ all space, time and matter also began. Remember our gravity example. The minute gravity appears, you feel its power. In a similar way, the minute an impersonal creative force appears, we would then observe its power in the creation of the universe. This means that the impersonal force would only be as old as the universe that was created as a result of its existence.”



“But wait a minute; if that is true, we have a dilemma! If the creative cause of the universe is only as old as the universe itself, then we must ask the obvious question, ‘Hey what caused THAT force to exist?’ Whatever caused the cause of the universe; THIS would then be the more powerful cause we would want to identify! Do you see the problem here? A true and singular first cause must be eternal by definition. In a very real sense, we innately know that whatever caused this ‘caused universe’ must be some kind of eternal first cause with the ability to DECIDE. Whatever caused this universe, it did so as a DECISION, and this ability to decide gives away the fact that the first cause of the universe is, in fact, a PERSONAL force.”

“I believe that PERSONAL THEISM is true because the first, uncaused cause of the universe was able to DECIDE as a personal agent.”

More to Think About

Careful thinking about the nature of the 'first cause' of the universe leads us to expect this 'first cause' to be personal in nature, and the Bible confirms this reality! As Christians, we believe in a personal God who not only has the ability to decide, but decides to act in love toward us. Throughout the Bible we read verses that describe God's continuing acts of DECISION:

1 Samuel 24:15

"The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand."

Zephaniah 3:8

"Therefore, wait for Me," declares the LORD, "for the day when I rise up to the prey. Indeed, My decision is to gather nations, to assemble kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all My burning anger..."

John 15:16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last."

Psalms 75:2

"When I select an appointed time, it is I who judge with equity."

Job 34:14-15

If He should determine to do so, if He should gather to Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust.

More than this, the Scriptures demonstrate that this personal God DECIDES to act in our favor. He DECIDES to act to save us, to love us and to rescue us from our sin, even while we are in the midst of our own rebellion:

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died (chose to die) for us.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that He gave (chose to give) His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

It's important for us to appeal to the personal nature of God as we begin to talk about the nature of the religious system that best represents Him. It is the fact that God is personal (and has created us as His personal creation) that is the key to his desire to provide us with guidelines for living. He DECIDED to create us (when he didn't have to), and it is reasonable to assume that God would not create something that he would not later care for or steward.

Step Three: What Kind of Faith System is Most Reasonable?

“If there is a God who is all-powerful and personal, it certainly makes sense that He might be concerned for the welfare of His personal creations. If he doesn't care about us, why would he create us in the first place? If he had the choice NOT to create us (He could have decided otherwise), the fact that He chose to create us should give us good reason to think that He actually cares about us. Even the atheist has to explain WHY there is something here when there could easily be nothing here! It is reasonable to infer that a God who creates (when He doesn't have to) would care about the condition of what He has created. A God like this would want to guide His creation toward true moral 'goodness', the kind of 'goodness' that would reflect His own character. After all, a being with this kind of incredible power (the power to decide to create the entire universe) would also have the power to eliminate imperfection, including moral imperfection. A God like this would be a PERFECT being.”

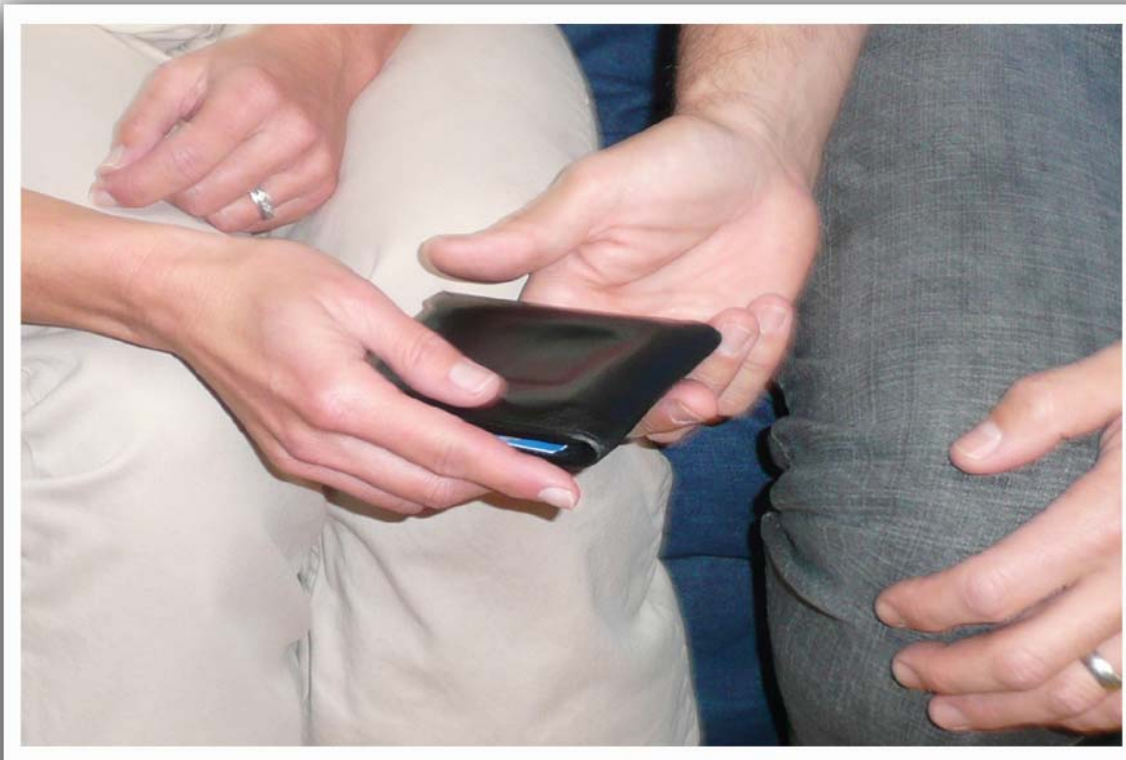
“It makes sense that a personal creator God would want his personal creations to understand and strive for the very values that are a reflection of his nature. It's reasonable to assume that a personal God might present us with guidelines for living and then encourage us to live by these guidelines. And this is where we need to take some time to think about the nature of God. Let's think about how God might reasonably expect us to live a truly moral life. Our human instinct is to create RULES that we can follow so that we can measure our success and judge how close we are to being 'Godly', but does a system of rules actually create a Godly person?”

“Now, you may have noticed that my wallet is still sitting on the ground. Imagine that I have a really bad back and I’m unable to bend over to pick up the wallet. I might ask you to pick it up for me, and if you did, this generous action on your part might be viewed as a morally good act. I might then find myself wanting to reward you by giving you the dollar that started this whole conversation.”



(Ask the person with whom you are talking to pick up the wallet)

“But what if you knew in advance that I would give you the dollar as a reward if you would help me pick up the wallet? What if you ONLY picked up the wallet because you wanted that dollar? Would your actions still be seen as morally good, or would your greedy motive ruin the nature of the action? If you and I are only ‘being good’ so that we can EARN a prize, are we being truly ‘good’? If all my good actions were driven by my desire to get something in return, would we still call my actions ‘good’?”

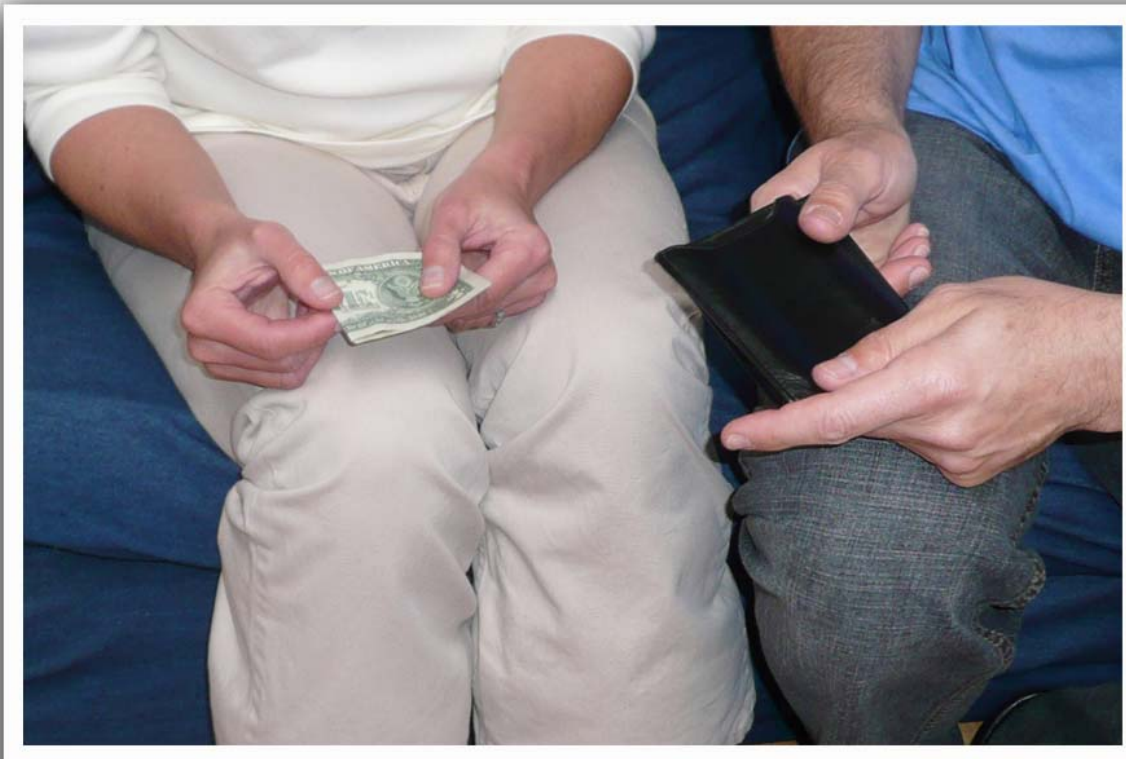


(Take the wallet, and give the person the dollar)

“It seems to me that rules-based and works-based religious systems don’t actually produce ‘good’ people. They instead produce people who LOOK good. True goodness is a heart condition. It’s a reflection of who we are when no one is looking. It’s a reflection of our desire to do what’s right, even when there is nothing in it for us. It’s one thing to experience joy or satisfaction for doing what you know you ought to do; it’s another thing to do something ONLY because you are hoping to gain a prize. If we are only ‘performing’ because we are hoping to get the reward of ‘Salvation’, we’re merely trying to serve ourselves by earning a prize. On the other hand, if our hearts are so changed that we desire to behave morally even when the carrot of Salvation is not dangling in front of us, then we can say that we truly are ‘good’ people.”



“If you are looking for a spiritual worldview in which truly good people are even possible, you are going to have to look for one that does not REQUIRE good works. Now what religious worldview teaches that Salvation is NOT the result of anything that you can do, but is instead the result of something that has already been done for you by God Himself? There is only one; it is called Christianity. The Christian worldview teaches that Jesus came to pay the price for every ‘less than perfect’ thing you ever did; every sin and crime you’ve ever committed. God doesn’t judge us based on any good deed we might do, because our good deeds aren’t all that impressive if you really think about it. Instead, God accepts us on the basis of who JESUS is and the price that he paid for us if we will only believe in Him and trust HIM instead of ourselves. Good works are not REQUIRED for Salvation, even though they are typically the RESULT of our transformation. True moral goodness comes when we live and love in response to what has already been done for us, and not because we are hoping to win a prize.”



“I believe that CHRISTIAN THEISM is true because it best accounts for God’s desire to enable and encourage true moral behavior”

More to Think About

The Christian faith is distinctly characterized by the concept of GRACE, the unmerited free gift of Salvation. This is what defines Christianity and distinguishes it from ALL other faith systems. Think about it for a minute and compare the Christian view of Salvation to other world religions:

If you're a Jew

You obey the Ten Commandments

If you're Muslim

You obey the Five Pillars of Faith

If you're a Buddhist

You obey the implications of the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path

If you're a Baha'i

You must keep the Baha'i Law

If you're a Hindu

You must perform good deeds (Karma Yoga), work to attain a state of consciousness in meditation (Jnana Yoga), or perform acts of worship, temple rituals, and pilgrimages (Bhakti Yoga)

If you're a Jehovah's Witness

You must perform good works that fulfill God's will

If you're a Scientologist

You must work toward spiritual enlightenment and an attainment of brotherhood with the universe

If you're a Mormon

You obey the Ten Commandments of Judaism, every commandment of Jesus, and the teachings of all the Mormon Prophets!

If there truly is a God powerful enough to create everything we see, then this God is certainly powerful enough to bring us home. A powerful God is not impressed with the works of men. A powerful God does not need our help. A powerful God is fully able to get the job done on His Own. Happily, there is one faith system that reflects these truths about the nature of God. There is only one ancient understanding of God that recognizes the fact that God alone is the only being powerful enough to save you. That ancient set of beliefs is called Christianity, and it is rooted in verifiable history.

Romans 3:21-28

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in

His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

We are no longer under the obligation of the law; we are no longer chasing salvation like a carrot at the end of a stick. Our Salvation is secure in Christ; that goal has already been achieved. If we love now, if we act to serve others and love those around us, we do it not because we have to, but because we are overflowing and responding to the love that has already been shown us:

John 13:34

“...love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

1 John 4:19

We love, because He first loved us.

This is the source of true moral goodness; acting not because we are trying to grab the prize, but because we have been changed by the love of God.

Conclusion: There Are Lot's of Good Reasons

“So, I think there are some really good reasons to believe what I believe about God and the nature of His message to us. I am a Christian because:

(1) I believe that THEISM (the belief in an all-powerful first cause that is NOT part of the natural caused universe) best accounts for the appearance of our universe, and...

(2) I believe that PERSONAL THEISM best accounts for the nature of this ‘first cause’ and the fact that this cause had the ability to DECIDE to begin the universe, and...

(3) I believe that CHRISTIAN THEISM best accounts for the possibility of true moral goodness (something that a Personal God would desire for his creation)

In the end, the Christian Worldview best accounts for the reality we see in our universe and in our lives as moral beings. Could more be said about Christianity? Of course! We’ve only just begun! But in three short steps I hope I have at least placed Christianity in a position of rational consideration. I hope that I have at least given you some reason to stop and think twice about the truth of the Christian worldview...”

